

The Grizzlies of the
163rd Air Refueling Wing
Prove they are the...

Bear

NECESSITIES

By Senior Airman D. Clare, 163rd Air Refueling Wing
Photos by Chief Master Sergeant Bill Nicoletti



Returning Senior Airman Rebecca Hatfield, Crew Chief, 163rd Aircraft Generation Squadron, greets her son.



After delivering more than 10 million gallons of fuel during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, members of the 163d Air Refueling Wing, the "Grizzlies," returned home from Souda Bay, Crete, Greece May 9–June 4th.

From the opening days of the conflict to May 1, when the president declared an end to major fighting, the wing's KC-135 Stratotanker aircrews spent nearly 1,000 hours in the air flying more than 150 sorties, most of which involved missions directly over enemy airspace in Northern Iraq.

The squadron refueled nearly every type of Air Force aircraft participating in the conflict, as well as many Navy and Marine Corps aircraft. Missions included refueling precision bombers that struck Baghdad and C-17s that dropped airborne personnel to secure airfields in Northern Iraq. As major combat slowed, the squadron's aircraft refueled planes returning mine-detecting dolphins and many of the American soldiers who were returning after being captured by the Iraqi military.

"These people should be extremely proud of what they've done," said Colonel Al Aimar, 163rd Air Refueling Wing Commander. "They worked extremely hard, and they proved themselves worthy when our nation needed them most."

The unit exceeded its wartime tasking on many occasions, according to Lieutenant Colonel Bill Boswell, Maintenance Group

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Commander. During an eight-day period in March, at the height of the air war, Grizzly aircrews flew 66 consecutive sorties. On any given day during the war, an average of five sorties were flown.

The wing achieved approximately a 96% mission effectiveness. To accomplish such a feat, thousands of maintenance hours were poured into the aircraft around-the-clock during the war. Aircraft maintenance personnel worked 12-hour days consistently.

“It’s been truly amazing,” said Lieutenant Colonel Boswell. “Everyone here did everything that was expected of them and more.” “The weather was truly miserable,” said Boswell. “But the work goes on. It seems like the more they tasked us, the better we performed.” “We knew we were making a difference,” said Senior Airman Desiree Bricks, Crew Chief. “We’re the ones who get that plane up in the air. We’d launch the planes and then go to the chow hall and watch CNN to see what the aircraft were hitting.”

Much of the unit’s mission success was due to the training, experience, and readiness of aircrews and maintenance and logistics personnel. “We were prepared,” said Chief Master Sergeant Tony Dempsey. “Our airplanes arrived in great shape and we worked tirelessly to maintain them.”

The “Grizzlies” of the California Air Guard’s 163rd Air Refueling Wing proved once again that they are definitely the “Bear Necessities.” 🐾

